

THE HAND OF THE UNKNOWN

By ROBERT RUSSELL

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Synopsis of Chapters Already Published

James Alton, a young man brought up in the lowest quarter of New York, but of education and fine instincts, leaves the city after an altercation with his brutal father. Before taking his train he finds a hand-bag which has been dropped by a young woman sitting near him. Mrs. Grace Gordon, at the moment a telegram was handed to her. Unable to return the bag, Alton boards his train, and during the night the bag is stolen from him, but subsequently recovered. Arrived at his destination, Chanton, a country town, Alton seeks to return the bag to Mrs. Gordon, who happens to live there, but in so doing encounters Frank Black, an important personage. In love with Grace, Black accompanies Jim to her house, where, to the amazement of all, the girl reveals to Alton and shows him a picture of his neck, calling him "Jim."

It develops that Grace has been made insane by news contained in the telegram that her brother and baby have been burnt to death in the fire which nearly destroyed Chanton, and seeing Jim, the last person she had noticed before her mind became deranged, she takes him for her brother, who she believes can restore her child. Old Dr. Jordan says that Jim must pose as her brother, a distant relative, but humor Grace in her belief that he is her brother. She finds in the bag Jim's picture, which she shows to her baby, which inspires the hope that the baby may not be dead after all. That night Jim and Grace, gypsy on the porch and sends him to jail, where Black manages also to get Jim. The evidence of a postal card received from his father. But Dr. Jordan, with the connivance of a friendly justice (Squire Baldwin), arranges bail for him, as Grace cannot bear to have the one she supposed to be her brother out of her sight. The doctor now tells Jim that they have reached the most decisive step of all.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A GYPSY'S LOVE.

THAT the plan contemplated by Dr. Jordan was of a nature far more radical than any yet suggested was evident from the great solemnity with which he addressed Jim, and the latter felt that the crucial moment in this perplexing situation had arrived.

"Can we remain till after breakfast, Dr. Jordan?" he asked. "She wants us now, and you do not know how good it is to be here again, knowing that I can remain safely."

"Yes, Jim, we'll wait, and perhaps I'd better think the thing over a bit longer myself before advising it. Come."

Into the breakfast room they went, and were met by the smiling girl. Mrs. Graham, however, looked pale and ill. She had seen enough of the proceedings through the window to know that something of importance had happened.

A reassuring nod from the doctor as he entered set her mind temporarily at rest, and it was a rather happy party that assembled for the morning meal.

"Jim and I, Dr. Jordan," said Grace, when they had nearly finished, "a going to take a long drive this morning and discuss what's best to be done about the baby."

"A good idea, Grace, and I'll visit with your father and mother away from here. When you get back we'll have a council of war."

The girl looked at him keenly. "I've been thinking a lot," she went on. "And—well, Jim and I will talk it over. I'm not absolutely blind, you know, and I have some sense of reason—if I am only 20 years old."

But even the fear that the girl might have guessed part of the deception in regard to her child which they had practiced upon her did not take from the old man the joy he felt in the knowledge that she would have no return of the terrible condition which had so worried him the day before.

"That's right," he said. "Talk it all over with Jim, and whatever he says will be wise, I know."

And so they ended breakfast in the best of spirits, Jim leaving the others to order the horse, and Grace preparing for her drive.

"We'll be back in plenty of time for dinner," called Grace as she and Jim started off. "And be sure to be here, Dr. Jordan; we'll have a lot to talk about."

"All right, Grace," he answered. Then as the young couple drove away he stood watching them far down the road.

"A good looking couple," he remarked to Mrs. Graham, who stood by his side; "A good looking couple. Now come in, I want to talk to you."

In the same direction they had taken on their other drive together, Jim and Grace started, and the day was just as perfect as that other had been.

"Jim," began Grace almost at once, "I know you have done it all for me, sake, as everything you do is for me, but I know now that you have all been deceiving me. You do not know where baby is."

Once again it was only his instinct Jim could rely upon in the face of this startling statement, but again that instinct was right.

"No, dear," he replied, "we don't know where baby is, but we do know pretty well that he is safe."

"And you have a clue, Jim?"

"Yes, dear, and I want to follow it."

"Jim, listen to me, dear. You're my brother—aren't you? The greatest sort of a brother in the world. The kind of a brother who fills every corner

of my heart and leaves no room for more love for a man. And my baby is gone. See, dear, I am not weeping—with you by me I can talk quietly about it."

"Yes, Grace—always quietly, dear."

"And we must find the baby—little Jim whom I named after you. And, of course, you will have to find him. But with all I have suffered, I cannot bear to be separated from you, Jim. We must go together, anywhere, wherever the search takes us—and even though it takes us all our lives."

"Grace, Grace," cried Jim, "you know surely how I long to be with you always—but, can't you imagine places where I would have to go alone in such a search?"

"Would you be happy in success—or would I, Jim—if you should bring my baby back to a ravine mother? And that would I be, Jim, as surely as we are here together now, if I am separated from you again."

The old doctor's words came back to Alton, and he knew that what this insane girl said was true.

"Then rest your head, dear," he said at last. "We will drive quietly now, and perhaps to one of us will come a way out. We must find the baby."

"And we must be together."

"Yes."

Over the soft road trotted the little horse, carrying them quickly through the gloomy morning. Now the way would be hot with the summer sun, now cool where the heat was tempered by the shade of great trees. And all the time two minds were busy in the endeavor to solve the problem.

It seemed clear to Jim that he must at once go to New York and see if the message brought by the gypsy had anything to do with the child, and also investigate at the saloon beneath his former home to ascertain if Bixby were a real person. This last, however, he felt was no clue, for Bixby could not have supposed that this message had ever reached Mrs. Gordon.

The first contained a possibility. Their drive homeward was a silent one, Grace apparently content that she had made Jim understand that she was to be with him always in the future, he elated over this new possibility of success.

It was luncheon hour when they arrived, and Mrs. Graham and the doctor were seated on the porch waiting for them.

"Prompts itself," cried the old man, as Jim and Grace returned from the stable where she had given the horses their expected lumps of sugar.

"And, Dr. Jordan," cried Jim, "I've got a great plan to tell you. I can scarcely wait."

"Oh, Jim," cried the girl, coming close to him, "what is the matter—they're not going to separate us?"

"Never, dear, if I can help it!"

"Listen, Grace," and the old man's eyes sought the floor. "You're not the only one who has lost a child—and we know that your baby is alive—for nearly twenty years ago your mother loved and lost a little one. She was nearly frantic with grief, and your father beside himself."

"Mother, mother," sobbed the girl, "I know how you suffered."

"One night I was returning home from a late call to a sick patient, when from my doorstep came a faint cry, and there I found, bundled up in warm clothing, a little boy baby."

Jim's eyes were fixed upon the girl. "I took the little one into my home and not five minutes later came a messenger from your father—we had no telephones then—saying that your mother was perhaps dying. It was a year before you were born, dear."

Mrs. Graham was crying, almost shuddering at the honestly spoken lies.

"Boy," began Dr. Jordan when they were seated near the thick growing

vine, "do you love that poor girl in there?"

"Oh, Dr. Jordan, don't laugh at me," cried Jim. "Don't laugh at me. Love her, why?" and he looked into the old man's eyes from his very soul, "why you don't know what love is—nobody knows but I."

"Do you love her enough, and have you strength enough, loving her, to take her for your wife, to have the right before all the world to protect and care for her—and yet—and yet to remember all the time that she's absolutely insane—and that she won't know when she recovers her mind that she is your wife—that when she recovers her reason she may not, probably will not, know you by sight?"

"Oh, doctor, doctor, I love her and I have strength enough for anything—anything."

"And, boy," the old man went on mercilessly, "when that reason does return to her do you know that you will be able to come to her—and before that God in whom you believe, swear that you will so be able to come to her—and say that you've protected and guarded—only protected and guarded her, that—"

"By the memory of dreams of my mother—I will go to her when I've brought back her baby and her reason has returned, I'll go to her and be able to say to her all that you would have me; and then, after that, perhaps, I'll be worthy to seek her love."

"But," Jim, went on, "how can I marry her, when she thinks I am her brother?"

"You will understand that, Jim, when I tell her now. You will see how I have thought that out. And remember, Jim, that the marriage is voidable in law as she is insane, but it's the only way to give hope of her recovery—by her side you must be every moment—and as her husband, Jim."

Into the house they went together, and at the door Grace met them.

"Oh, how foolish I am, Jim. I don't mind showing you, doctor—you are so, like one of us. But why is it that I cannot bear to have him away from me?"

"Listen, Grace," and the old man took her hand. "Come in here into this room where I have been used to sit for forty years; back when your father was alive, dear, and your mother. They were my friends, Grace, and you seem almost like my child now."

"Oh, Dr. Jordan," cried Mrs. Graham, "is it right, are we sure? Can we trust Jim?"

"If we can't," and the old man's eyes flashed, "then heaven pity that body of his."

"Amen," cried Jim. "May it be damned eternally—"

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longer an ignorant gypsy—she's as wise as the grandest mother in the land."

"Yes," muttered Jim, "and we may be able to make that love help us."

CHAPTER XXIX.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE.

THE swartly child was soon soothed back to quiet, and the mother returned to the roadside. One member of the family had suffered and was well again, now she sought to discover what these strangers could do for the head of that family.

"You see my man?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes, I can," responded Jim. "Can he speak English?" remembering the fellow's pretended ignorance.

"Some time," she answered, a faint gleam of humor in her eyes.

"And he knows where the baby is?"

"See him," was the diplomatic response.

"You stay here till we come tomorrow."

"Yes, yes, stay all time—you come!"

With a last look at the child who had fallen from the wagon, to make sure that he would be able to remember it, Jim clirped to the horse and they were on their way again.

"Don't you see, Grace," he said gently, "this is the surest course of all, if the gypsy knows? He would do anything to get away from jail, and he can take me, perhaps, to the very place where the baby is."

"Take us you mean, Jim. I'm going, too, you know."

"Yes, dear, you too."

And he fell into deep thought. It did seem that now there was a way surer and better than going to New York.

The child had been stolen from here, and in all probability was kept somewhere near this place, safe until such time as the abductors would dare to make a move.

They would not be apt to carry the child about the country for fear of creating suspicion.

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"If we can't," and the old man's eyes flashed, "then heaven pity that body of his."

"As though directed, I picked up the baby—no one had seen him there on the steps—and drove straight to your mother's home, here, this very house, where she was lying upstairs. With a word to your father I placed the baby by her side."

No one moved for a moment. Then the girl's eyes grew big.

"Well, the baby stayed there with her, and your mother recovered in the mother's home, here, this very house, where she was lying upstairs. With a word to your father I placed the baby by her side."

All watched the forming of the whisper on her lips.

"And that baby is Jim?"

"Did he know before today?"

"No."

"But Grace, dear," he cried, "I—"

"Why, Jim, dearest—stay there for a little minute. You don't have to tell me, boy. It seems as though every one in the world must know—it didn't seem right all the while—since baby went away—that I should love my brother as I loved you—or that you should love a sister as your eyes told me—every moment—that you loved me."

Several years ago another prisoner hid himself in the same sewer for forty-eight days, not surrendering until so starved that he died a few days after being brought out.

COLUMBUS, Ohio, May 21.—Set on their mottos by the humorists of nearly every Ohio newspaper, who poked fun at the new guards of the State penitentiary for being unable to find a convict who had hidden himself on the premises, the guards made one last fine toothcomb search during the night, and discovered Harvey Johnson, the elusive prisoner, in a sewer under the building.

But, though found, Johnson has not been captured. The officers this morning declared they knew right where he was, but as yet they have devised no method to bring him out.

Johnson, who is serving a life term, disappeared Wednesday by ripping up boards in the workshop and crawling under the floor.

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